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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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**HOLY WARS: AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL'S
EARLY BATTLES FOR THE PROMISED LAND**

by

Judith C. Ackerson

Lieutenant Commander, USN

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature:

JC Ackerson

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Paper directed by
H. W. Clark, Jr., Captain, U.S. Navy
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department
Donald H. Estes, U.S. Navy
Division Head, Intelligence Division

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Abstract of

HOLY WARS: AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL'S EARLY BATTLES FOR THE PROMISED LAND

The *Old Testament* of the *Bible* contains numerous detailed descriptions of battlefield operations suitable for study as case histories. By way of example, the battles of Saul and David, as depicted in the books of *I and II Samuel*, are converted into contemporary operational terminology, and analyzed accordingly. If historical detail is viewed separately from religious significance, several books of the *Old Testament* and *Apocrypha* are at least as historically accurate and valuable as *Thucydides' History of The Peloponnesian War*, a cornerstone of the Naval War College Curriculum. In view of modern day relevance, the case studies of the roots of the first Holy Wars in the Near and Middle East are clearly of continuing military significance.

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PREFACE

Since it should be clearly understood that *I and II Samuel*, in their entirety, are essentially paraphrased throughout this paper, only direct quotes therefrom are attributed. Exact dates (always) and exact locations (often) are unavailable; when Biblical historians are in general agreement, I have used a consensus of their best estimates without attribution.

The books of *Samuel* were written by at least two authors; in instances when two events appear to differ only in details, I have assumed, as have many Biblical historians, that they are merely two versions of the same event, and have treated them as such.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT	ii
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF MAPS	v
I INTRODUCTION	1
II BACKGROUND	3
III SAUL'S WARS	6
IV DAVID'S REVENGE	11
V THE WARS OF EXPANSION	15
IV LESSONS FOR TODAY'S COMMANDER, AND TOMORROW'S.	18
NOTES	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

LIST OF MAPS

<u>FIGURE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
I.	Tribal Claims During the Period of the Judges	3
II.	The Empire of David and Solomon	17
III.	Israel Today	20

Holy Wars: An Operational Analysis of Israel's
Early Battles for the Promised Land

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Saul and David rose from relative obscurity to become the first kings of a united Israel, almost entirely due to their military prowess (even after becoming kings, their primary title was *nagid*, or "military commander")¹. Their rules were marked by frequent battles against a variety of enemies, most markedly an intense campaign against the Philistines, which lasted through the majority of both reigns of these early warrior-leaders. Although an in-depth study of their battles clearly shows the beginnings of an appreciation for the operational art of war, the execution of their plans sometimes fell short of the mark, mainly through their consistent failure to consider alternatives, to optimize available resources, or to utilize opportunities for force modernization and future planning.

Israel is viewed as a holy land by three of today's major religious groups: Jews, Christians, and Muslims. But to the Jews, it takes on a further significance -- this is their "promised land," the reward for their steadfast belief through days of suffering and years of homeless wandering. The fact that it was already occupied when they discovered it was of no consequence. They fought to gain it, fought to expand it, and fought to keep it. More than 3,000 years later, the fight goes on.

A basic premise of the Naval War College is that the informed commander studies warfare; not just the most recent wars, but also the most ancient. The "Strategy and Policy" course opens with the writings of Sun Tzu and Thucydides. Just as the *History of The Peloponnesian War* chronicles the dispute between Athens and Sparta, the *Old Testament* chronicles the very beginnings of the Israelites' battles with almost every cultural group within

marching range - the roots of conflicts which continue today, and no doubt will reach into the future.

Historical perspectives of foreign countries, their peoples, their cultures, and their interactions with their neighbors is very handy background information to have, regardless of whether those countries are allies or enemies. The potential for a future flare-up involving Israel is very real; it was one of America's major side-concerns in the recent Persian Gulf conflict. The thousands-of-years-old issues (tribal, ethnic and religious differences and rivalries) which still divide the countries of the Near and Middle East are, or should be, of continuing significance to military and state department personnel.

Just as history repeats itself, so do the problems which appear to be inherent in battlefield operations. There are lessons to be learned from an in-depth study of any battle scene.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Circa 1000 B.C., the Israelites had been settled for more than 200 years following their exodus from Egypt. Immediately upon reaching their Promised Land, then called Canaan (later referred to as both Palestine and Israel), they won a series of battles against the native inhabitants and divided the conquered land into tribal territories (12 Tribes of Israel).

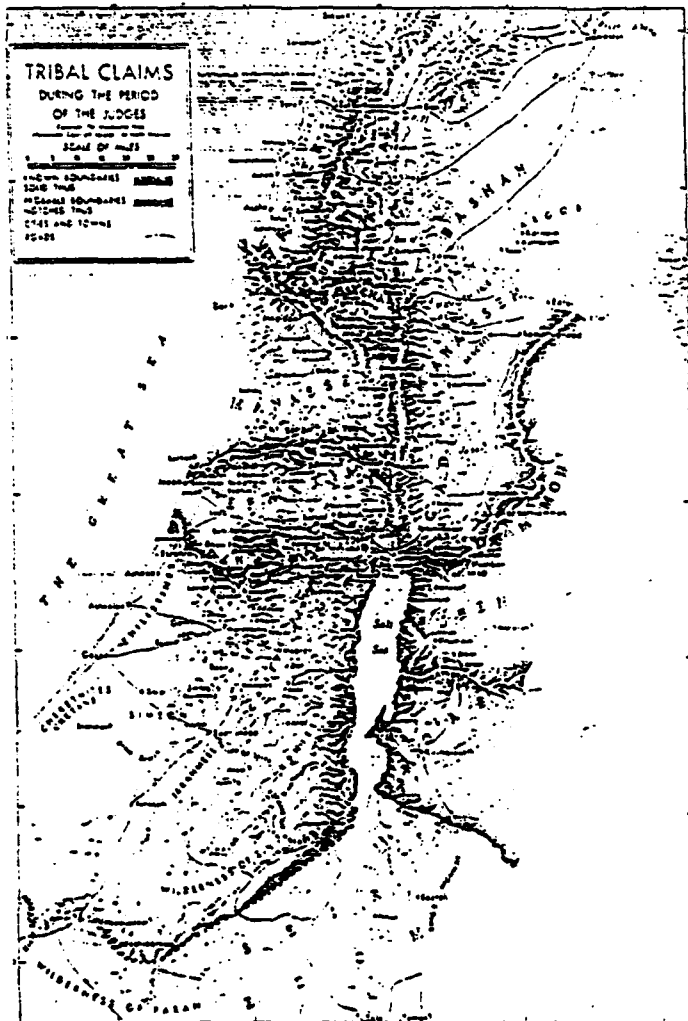


Figure I

Source: The Interpreter's
Dictionary of the Bible,
Appendix Map VI

The majority of the displaced Canaanites fled north, where they then became known as Phoenicians, the Greek translation of Canaanite.¹ It was not uncommon for entire groups of people to move en masse to a new location, giving the new town the name of the old one; this is one of the factors which makes exact identification of Biblical locations so difficult to pinpoint.

Cities were differentiated from villages and towns by virtue of the fact that cities were walled. It was the norm for a city to be surrounded by agricultural villages whose people looked to the city as a protective refuge. Fortress cities were built specifically for this purpose.²

Unable to overcome the walled cities which some of the original Canaanites -- and the relative newcomers, the Philistines -- had built on the fertile plains and coastal regions, the Israelites compromised by establishing their agrarian communities on the sides of the nearby hills, eventually learning to peacefully co-exist with the Canaanite population. Over time, each group assimilated aspects of the other's cultures. The Philistines also adopted many Canaanite ways, but they were not so accepting of the Israelites.

The Philistines, or Sea People, were originally displaced peoples fleeing from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (Crete), barbarians (Greece) and the Trojan War. Eventually settling in Palestine (an Egyptian colony at the time), they were hired as mercenaries to guard Egypt's interests and trade routes there, and given land where they formed a confederation of five cities (Gath, Ekron, Gaza, Ashkalon, and Asadon) from whence "their merchant ships made them rich and their fighting ships controlled the Palestinian coast."³ Over time, as Egyptian power waned, their own influence grew, and they began to be uncomfortable with the crowding caused by the Israeli villages, and with the lack of security caused by Israelites occupying the territory's heights.

The Philistines set about dividing Israeli tribes through occupation of the hill country between the Israeli cities of Aphek and Shiloh as the first step in a campaign designed to expand Philistia, and defeat and subjugate the Israelites. Their considerable success fueled the Israeli desire for a king to direct, focus and coordinate an effective military response.

The Israelite tribes were not truly united -- their religious beliefs were their common thread. Each of these independent entities was governed by a Judge, a wise man who made tribal decisions when the need arose. Their military troops were likewise "need driven," as volunteers banded into coalition militia units against common enemies, which dissolved when the danger had passed. Logistical arrangements consisted of bringing equipment with them, acquiring supplies en route, or having family members bring food and other necessities to the front.

As the Philistines became bolder and greater numbers of Israelite cities fell under their control, it was clear to all concerned that the old way of going about the business of war was no longer effective. The renowned judge, Samuel, suggested the young warrior, Saul, to be named as the first king of a united Israel: he was unanimously accepted.

CHAPTER III

SAUL'S WARS

Quick to recognize that his support base was predicated upon the people's desire for liberation from their Philistine oppressors and security against further Philistine advances, Saul's first act as king was to organize and train a standing Israeli army which, as a guerrilla strike force utilizing speed and surprise, rose unexpectedly against Philistine outposts and won stunning victories, recapturing many of the formerly Israeli territories and temporarily stilling future threat.¹ That he was able to do so attests to his brilliant grasp of the basics of operational art, for he optimized his little army (3,000 men, at most) to defeat the numerically superior forces of the Philistines, who were the only people of the area to have the knowledge of iron-making at that time (as opposed to the bronze weaponry of the Israelites). Additionally, the Philistine army was much more organized and rigidly structured, with a firm grasp of tactical maneuvering.

"The Israelites had nothing to compare with the Philistine chariotry, the enemy's mobile striking force, whose three-man crews, armed with maces and spears, tore through the ranks of the opposing infantry like a scythe through wheat. Behind them, paired into four-man units, ranged the infantry, seemingly invincible in their coats of mail, bronze helmets, greaves and shields. The Philistine warriors were armed with a formidable arsenal of weapons: straight swords for hand-to-hand fighting; deadly javelins with loop and cord about the shaft, which they hurled with precision in combat at greater range; and leather slings which laid down a deadly shower of fire over long distances."²

Saul's operational scheme was simple, but effective: pit strength against weakness, and avoid situations in which that strategy could be turned against his own forces.

"If the Philistines were pre-eminent in set-piece battle, Israel ... would resort to overcoming mass with speed and strategic retreat; superiority in weaponry with sudden attack. She would strike in the hills and mountain passes, where Philistine chariots were useless. She would stand and fight only at times and places of her own choosing ... If (the Philistines) warred by day and slept at night, Saul would strike by night and vanish at dawn ... And if Israel could not manufacture weapons of iron, she could steal them from the enemy dead."

"For maximum maneuverability, Saul deployed his forces into three groups. Each could attack on a fixed front, or against the Philistine flank, or be held in reserve. He could use one force as the hammer, flushing and pursuing the enemy as he scattered in wild retreat; while the other two units became the anvil, a deadly human wall picketed with spears planted across the escape path, against which the fleeing foe dashed itself ..."³

With the aid and counsel of his son, Jonathan, and his force commander, Abner, Saul had succeeded in winning public approval and securing his political base through his masterful military maneuvers. Although he can not

be faulted for the lack of time to perfect his force composition previously, Saul now failed to use this afterglow period to initiate basic improvements which would have paid off later. The time was ripe, for example, for public acceptance of military expansion, possibly through the introduction of conscription. The Philistines had been humbled and weakened, but there was no formal peace agreement and the threat remained -- it was logical to conclude that they would regroup and return. Force modernization was imperative, but there was apparently no attempt to acquire iron-smelting technology, or to procure chariots. While impractical in the hills of Israel, and unnecessary to the guerilla warfare so far practiced by the fledgling army, it was clear by this point that the Israelis were going to need to expand their base of operations in order to secure future security, and chariots were the enemy's platform of choice.

Saul's failure to take the logical next steps appears to have been due to a severe mental illness brought about, or at least exacerbated, by the prophecy of Samuel, who was still the spiritual head of Israel. He rebuked Saul for having disregarded religious aspects of his job as ruler over an inherently religious kingdom, and announced his intent to name a more religious successor to the throne. Although Saul was at first not cognizant that the young shepherd boy, David, was the chosen one when he hired him to sing and play the lyre at the palace, his eventual realization led to chronic depression and fits of jealousy in direct proportion to David's rising popularity with the public; the crown prince, Jonathan, who accepted David's future role of monarch; and his daughter, Michal, who agreed to become his wife. Saul began a series of attempts to take David's life, beginning with the requirement of 100 Philistine foreskins as Michal's wedding price. David, whose former military exploits had made him a media hero, returned with double that number, intensifying Saul's jealousy when the public sang exaggerated versions of David's success:

*"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."*⁴

When Saul's attacks became more overt, David was eventually forced to flee for his life. Saul's madness now overcame his military perspicacity. His single-minded desire for David's death became a stronger objective than Israel's need for freedom and security. At grave and unnecessary risk to his citizens, he withdrew forces from key positions (where they'd been guarding Israeli settlements against attempts at reoccupation) in order to use them in a wide-reaching search for David, who was hiding out in caves in the hill country of Judah. Aware that David was getting logistical support and intelligence from villagers, Saul cut off David's supply lines through threats to all possible supporters, punctuating his intent by ordering the annihilation of the religious community at Nob which had sheltered David for a brief period.

David was forced to resort to pillaging isolated farms in order to feed himself and his growing personal army. Some of his former comrades-in-arms deserted the king to form the nucleus of this group, including Joab, who later became the commander of all Israel's troops. The army otherwise consisted of young adventurers, disaffected rebels, soldiers of fortune, foreign mercenaries, and outlaws. As David's troop strength grew to 600 men, it became impossible to live off Israelite farming communities, all of which were now aware of, and a growing number turning hostile toward, him.

Now unabashedly reacting in lieu of planning, Saul had lost his operational sharp edge, and on at least one occasion delivered himself up to David by laying camp on low ground directly below David's camp. David chose to use the opportunity for a psychological operation (stealing Saul's sword from beside his sleeping body), versus the tactical thrust which would have ended this costly chase. By military standards, it was the wrong decision, utilizing the same high degree of risk for a far lesser gain. Saul's embarrassment had no lasting effect, yet the advantages of his death would have been many. Saul himself was clearly the army's sole motivation for

seeking to engage David's forces, who were otherwise of no danger to them. Upon his death, the search would almost surely have been discontinued. Jonathan had always been prepared to turn the kingdom over to David. The Philistines, who were quick to take advantage of the internal Israeli strife, could have been halted early in their tentative assaults against Israeli border settlements.

Since David had left himself no alternative, he found it necessary to join his army to the Philistines as mercenaries, demanding only one rule of engagement -- they would not fight against Israeli troops. They were instead used as a defensive shield for Philistine settlements while the soldiers were away at battle, and generally found themselves pitted against the Amalekites, a group of uncivilized, predatory nomads who lived in the southern desert, riding camels into raids against Israelites and Philistines alike, stealing their crops and grain, and chasing off their livestock.

David's outlaw period was not wasted. Shielded by the superior Philistine troops, his men were in no danger from the Israelite army. Ostensibly loyal to his Philistine employers, whenever David was awarded booty from Philistine raids, or acquired some on his own, he apportioned a share to be sent back to the people of Judah who had supported him (however unwittingly) in his exile, rebuilding a power base there that he would call upon later. Additionally, it is likely that he also

*"... carried on a dangerous double-dealing role in his isolated situation ... David followed a procedure of barbarous extermination ... at the same time, he gave false accounting ... by killing off the allies of the Philistines, he did his own people a service and put himself in a position deserving their gratitude."*⁵

Saul's final battle against the Philistines was at Mount Gilboa, the point to which the Israelites had been forced back by Philistine advances. Philistine strategy and operations had improved considerably since their earlier battles with the Israelites:

"Instead of moving in strength up the narrow mountain passes, the Philistines would use as their invasion highway the broad valley called the Jezreel, farther to the north. Whoever controlled the valley controlled the movement of the caravans which bore the wealth of the Near East between Egypt and the city-states of Syria to the north and Mesopotamia to the east. The

valley was also the essential link between the Philistine coast and the majestic garrison of Beth-shean -- the inland fortress of the Philistines which protected the Jezreel Valley against incursions from the east or from the Jordan Valley.

"In one stroke, the Philistines would again secure the Jezreel Valley, begin the process of encircling Israel, drive a wedge between Saul and the Israelite tribes of the Galilee and draw Saul and his army onto terrain which favoured the more conventional set-piece strategy of the (Philistines) and their chariotry. Beyond that, if Saul moved north to meet them, his lines of communication and supply would be lengthened intolerably and be exposed to interdiction.

"The Philistines, on the other hand, had unchallenged mastery of both the coastal and sea approaches to the western Jezreel and were immune from flank attacks. Their ships and armies ... moved northwards from the five cities of Philistia and assembled at the port of Dor. From there, the Philistine columns, spearheaded and flanked by the chariots and cavalry, marched inland unopposed past the fortresses of Megiddo and Taanach -- among the last great enclaves of the Canaanites, who, in their decline, had effectively become vassals to the Philistines."

Saul was old and tired, no longer capable of the operational thinking which he had formerly used to outwit Philistine troops. Despite the fact that spies sent word of the planned attack, and Israeli reconnaissance forces were able to report Philistine progress into the valley, Saul -- with no apparent operational design -- led his vastly outnumbered forces forward into the conventional battle mode he had always eschewed in the past, and they were virtually annihilated. Although his troop commander, Abner, and son, Ishbosheth, were spared, Saul and his other three sons lost their lives (Saul, through deliberately falling on his sword, figuratively as well as literally).

With Bismarckian cunning, the Philistines installed Ishbosheth as the successor to the king of Israel -- in the tribes north of the Jebusite city of Jebus (later Jerusalem). They installed David as the king of the large southern tribe of Judah, where he had won a reputation as a patriot. As the Philistines had planned, it was not long until each challenged the other for full control of Israel, and their subsequent internal struggles progressively weakened them while keeping them from effectively forming a coalition for revenge against the Philistines. The ensuing civil war ended seven years later with Ishbosheth's assassination at the hands of his own men, and David's ascendancy to the throne of a tentatively reunited Israel.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID'S REVENGE

David, correctly perceiving that he would not get it, did not request Philistine permission to unite Palestine under his rule. Realizing that this challenge to Philistine subjugation would not go long unpunished, he began his rule like Saul before him, by developing an operational scheme for meeting the Philistine challenge.

The new coalition of forces from Israel-Judah were under the control of "The Thirty," an elite group of trusted officers who had fought with David since his mercenary period. There were other bonuses from that time: David had an intimate knowledge of Philistine territory, their order of battle, and even of their technique for iron-smelting. The Israeli army now had the tools and knowledge required to fight the Philistines on nearly equal terms.

Although the Philistines had long since caught on to the Israelite ploy of guerrilla warfare, they still had no effective means of fighting back. Since they had no spies in the Israeli camp, it was also still possible to utilize Saul's favored technique of surprise. David had learned much from Saul, but he also incorporated the Philistines' own idea of closing off the enemy's escape route. To do so effectively required a cooperative enemy; David planned to capitalize on the probable Philistine response of attempting to quickly follow and engage the fleeing Israelis.

The Israelite campaign began with surprise raids in the barren region of the heights of Adullam, overlooking southern Philistia, where David had spent his fugitive days. Finding the Israeli forces so deep within their territory had a psychological effect upon the Philistines, creating near panic in the populace. The choice was also excellent in view of the rugged terrain which strongly favored the Israelis, and rendered Philistine chariots useless. David's troops feigned defeat and withdrew further into the Valley of Rephaim,

where the entire Philistine army from Gath found themselves trapped when a detachment of Israelite troops blocked their escape route. Israelis hidden along the sides of the hills ambushed the exposed enemy troops with stones, arrows and spears until the Gath troops were totally annihilated. When the other four Philistine cities quickly attempted retaliation, they fared no better.¹

Except for their fortified cities, which Israeli troops still lacked the capability to attack, Philistia was totally vulnerable to the Israelis, who took aggressive action to surround and destroy the remaining Philistine troops stationed at outposts in the heights.

Until this point, Israeli battles had been in response to an immediate threat, or in defense of an actual attack. For the first time, they now had the luxury of the upper hand, and the time to plan their operations. Although David was quick to take credit for it, it was probably Joab who was the operational mastermind behind Israel's new era of offensive operations, and it was certainly Joab who was the on-scene commander for the majority of the battles from this point onward.

Since Saul's capital of Gibeah was too far north, and David's capital of Hebron was too far south to be effective over the newly expanded territory, David set his sights on Jerusalem, an attractive location almost at midpoint. It was an ideal location for a religious and governmental center, with security provided by nature in that it lay on a plateau of two hills, surrounded on three sides by deep ravines. But perhaps the most attractive feature of the city, in David's eyes, was that it was a Jebusite city, under Philistine occupation. Unfortunately, in order to obtain it, Israeli troops were first going to need to tame it.

Even if his army had been able to attack level fortress cities, they would still have been stymied by this one, whose steep approaches gave the defending army the advantage since besieging troops presented clear targets and were totally vulnerable to burning arrows, boiling water, or rocks and stones from above. The Israelites lacked the ability to crack, storm, breach or mine the walls, which defied tunneling through their roots in foundation trenches hewn into solid rock. Surrounding

the city and indefinitely interdicting its supply lines was rejected due to knowledge that Jerusalem was well supplied against such a tactic, and that it could conceivably tie up Israeli troops and logistical capabilities for years.²

David's intent was clear to all levels of command. No city was impregnable, and he wanted this one. It was Joab's job to figure out how to get it.

He began by conquering the Philistine base approximately five miles south, at Bethlehem, successfully ensuring that Jerusalem would get no outside assistance.

Israeli spies disguised as beggars, traders and religious pilgrims reported the existence of a sophisticated water system that consisted of a tunnel hollowed through rock to a spring located outside and far downhill from the city walls, from which water flowed to a sloping passageway which ended in a vertical shaft through which water jugs were lowered to be filled.

"Shortly thereafter, under cover of night, Joab stealthily led a large body of volunteers, several skilled climbers among them, to the spring in the eastern valley below Jerusalem. Within the cover of the water tunnel behind the Gihon Spring, torches were lit and ropes were looped over the shoulders of the agile men upon whom the penetration of Jerusalem depended ... Ropes were secured above and dropped to those waiting below ... Before the alarm could be spread through the sleeping city and the troops roused, Joab's men had penetrated the defences, reduced key Jebusite strongpoints along the walls and the main portals and opened the eastern gate from within to David's main force ... Jerusalem, which had resisted conquest for centuries, surrendered virtually intact."³

The clearly stated rules of engagement restricted Israeli troops from looting or killing (provided the conquered citizenry adopted Israeli customs and religious beliefs), since he intended to use the native populace to run essential services in "The City of David," avoiding the use of trained soldiers for such duties.

As a result of these early victories,

"The Philistines were reduced to a secondary role. Their hold over the shores of Palestine and Phoenicia was broken, and Phoenician maritime expansion became possible ... After their defeat by well-organized forces, the Philistine drive for expansion ceased. Philistine history was now that of individual cities, rather than that of a people acting in concert. It is quite possible that in the course of their battles with Saul and David, the ruling Philistine military class had been wiped out ..."⁴

It is conceivable that the destruction of the Philistines could have been achieved much earlier. The most obvious factor was the wasted time Saul

spent chasing after David, and David's failure to bring the personal vendetta to a more timely end when the opportunity presented itself.

It is also difficult to understand why the Israelites didn't attempt to procure a more diversified force. The synergistic effect that the addition of naval forces would have provided could have saved years of fighting. Although the Philistine navy appears not to have been a primary center of gravity for them, their merchant shipping almost surely was.

The Israelites were an agrarian community, able to provision their troops from the yield of their fields. The Philistines, on the other hand, were a military society dependent upon a flourishing trade economy based on unfettered shipping. A challenge to Philistine control of the sea lanes would, at the very least, have forced them to fight on two fronts. It is probable that the Israelites would have been able to acquire allies in a battle at sea. Had Israel sooner established friendly relations with Tyre, a coalition of the two forces would have been an awesome challenge. There is reason to believe that Tyre's King Hiram would have been amenable to such a suggestion, in that he

*"... had watched the trials and metamorphoses of the new state with more than passing interest ... Hiram had constructed a great merchant navy, and Phoenician expeditions were even now pushing out into the ... Mediterranean basin to establish trading colonies as far west as Spain, Sardinia and Sicily ... Hiram sought the grain, olive oil and wine of Israel. He wanted to secure friendly relations with the stripling nation which was securing its grip on the strategic cross-roads between Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Egypt ... he had much to gain from the total liquidation of the Philistine confederacy -- the only maritime power which had effectively challenged Phoenicia's control of the sea-coast and sea lanes of the Mediterranean."*⁵

An informal economic alliance of this type apparently had already been in existence in northern Israel for more than a hundred years, later becoming a major source of income during the rule of David's son, Solomon.

*"Ancient literature contains several other examples of such joint maritime enterprises. Israel had had little experience of the perilous art of seafaring. But, we may assume, Solomon had been deeply impressed by the experiences and sea-based prosperity of the northernmost Israelite tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Dan, Phoenicia's closest Israelite neighbors. The Song of Deborah speaks of Dan, which 'abides with the ships,' indicating that Danites took service as sailors as early as the beginning of the eleventh century BC. The ships were most probably the vessels of the Phoenicians."*⁶

CHAPTER V

THE WARS OF EXPANSION

The taste of expansionism David experienced through his victory at Jerusalem only whetted his appetite for more. Additionally, there were sound political and security reasons for his decisions to wage further war.

The region he ruled had traditionally been a hotbed of controversy due to its prime location: a vast coastal area provided one major north-south trade route, and its mountain passes furnished the other. Since the uncontested ownership of these two commercial arteries gave automatic and unlimited economic, political and strategic importance, it would have been irresponsible and foolhardy for David to delay in securing Israel's borders. There was infinitely more at risk by the lull of a tentative peace than there was in leading battle-hardened, recently victorious troops into a major, phased campaign against those neighbors which posed the most credible threats.

The biggest and most viable threat was from the east, where the large city-states of Ammon, Moab and Edom flanked the inland trade highway. The Israelites had experienced problems with each of these nations while passing through on their initial migration to Canaan, and there was no love lost between them, although David and the Ammonite king had been friendly. The old king had recently died, however, and his son and successor, who ruled Ammon from the city of Rabbah, had immediately formed an alliance (of which David was apparently unaware) with several city-states of Syria. When David sent a party of peace ambassadors to welcome the new ruler -- and test the waters -- they were turned away; a clear insult to all of Israel, and an invitation to war. Acting in anger, and with only partial intelligence regarding the enemy's order of battle, David ordered the entire Israelite army, under Joab's command, into battle against the Ammonites, hoping to storm their gates through the sheer sudden surprise of the attack. Ammon was prepared, however,

and her Syrian allies, led by the king of Syria's largest province of Zobah, promptly closed in on Israel's rear flank.

Joab ordered his forces divided, with the intent of fighting a two-front battle with a third detachment swaying to whichever front was in most immediate danger at any given time. Instead of reacting to the Syrian advance by fleeing (as the Syrians had apparently been expecting them to), the Israelites turned to the offensive and charged them. The Ammonite forces which had been guarding the gates to Rabbah quickly disappeared inside the city gates when they observed the legendary military might of the Syrians running away in hysteria.

With the Syrians no longer a threat, and the Ammonites behind city walls, a contingent of Israelites settled around Rabbah and prepared themselves for a lengthy siege. It lasted for nearly a year, until once again the Israelites were able to enter a walled city through capturing the water source. With the Ammonites half dead from thirst, Joab called David to the front to lead the successful Israelite assault on the city's gates. The captured city was annexed to Israel. Although little detail is known of the fall of Moab and Edom (except that David was unusually harsh with the Moabites, possibly because of their earlier treatment of his nomadic ancestors), their demise quickly followed that of Ammon.

In the meantime, the Syrians had returned to the north, where they began reinforcement of their ranks with the nomadic Arameans. David did not give them time to finish regrouping -- he went on the offensive before they could even mount an adequate defense.

*"David personally led his army across the Jordan and surprised the Syrians at Helam ... a phalanx of David's warriors penetrated to the Syrian rear and slew Shobach, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian league. The rout was total. Thousands of Arameans were killed or injured. The remainder fled or surrendered. David ordered the horses of Zobah's crack chariotry hamstringed. Zobah had twice challenged Israel. There would be no third time. David's action ended for all time the dominance of Zobah as the foremost military power in Syria ... with stunning abruptness, David had transfigured Israel. He had succeeded in making it the foremost power of the region between Egypt and Mesopotamia."*⁴

Many years had passed since David's outlaw days, when he had failed to turn back the Israelite army through his refusal to cause King Saul's death. He had apparently learned his lesson regarding the importance of identification and destruction of the enemy's center of gravity. His failure to keep Syria's chariots and horses for his own army's use indicates that he still possessed an appalling inability to grasp the obvious, however. Thirty years in the future, his son Solomon would own 1,400 chariots which he found immensely useful for patrolling and policing the vast ranges of the Israelite kingdom consolidated by David, which

*"... stretched from the barren desert in the south to the snow-crowned heights of Mount Hermon in the north, from the Mediterranean to the lands far east of the Jordan."*²

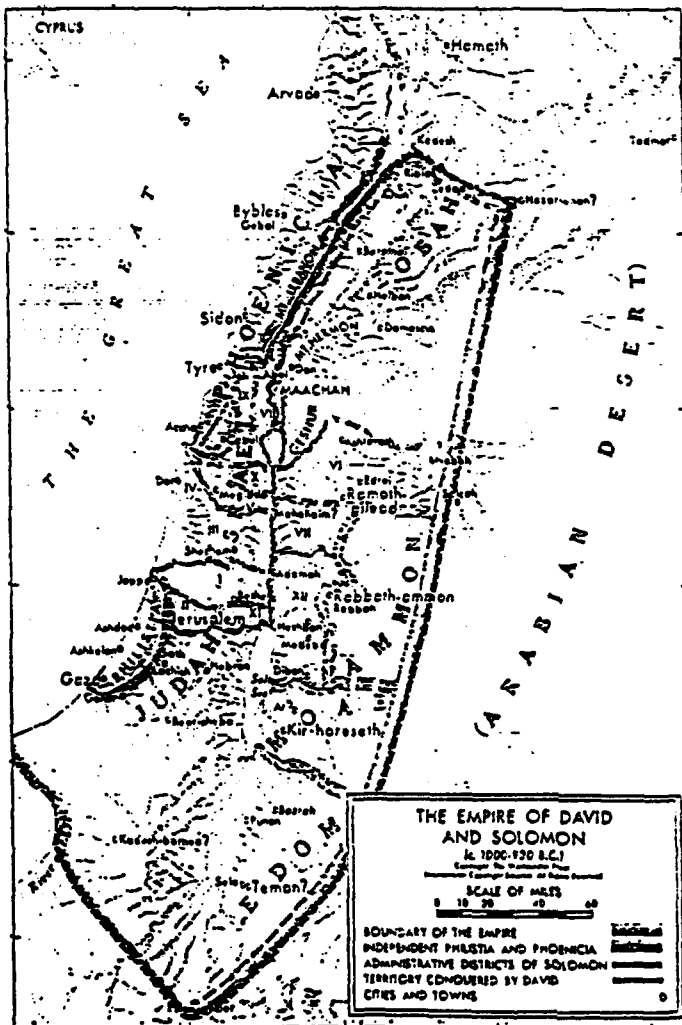


Figure II

Source: The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Appendix Map VII

CHAPTER VI
LESSONS FOR TODAY'S COMMANDER, AND TOMORROW'S

There are numerous general observations which evolve from this study, not the least of which is a validation of the timelessness of "operational principles of war."

The Israelites won time and again, in difficult circumstances and against the varying weaponry and tactics of different enemies, despite being outnumbered, less technologically advanced, or at a disadvantage of positioning. What they had going for them (aside from, presumably, God) was brilliant operational leadership along the lines of Clausewitz' omniscient "military genius," able to win against terrific odds through the ability to take advantage of openings and timing, knowing how to pit strength against weakness, and able to identify and attack the enemy's center of gravity. Both Saul and David, however, were fully successful only when they went beyond dependence on "coup d'oeil," and developed an operational plan.

Additionally, there are present-day parallels which may be drawn. David's outlaw period of friendship and military coalition with the Philistines eventually gave the Israeli army the knowledge of iron-making, which they later used to defeat the Philistine army. The United States similarly gives security assistance and military technology to countries today which we know we may have to fight in the future. Maybe it's time to ask ourselves if, for the sake of shaky alliances and economic gain today, we are selling our children's security.

Despite the fact that David eventually acquired Saul's entire army, he kept "The Thirty" as his personal staff. Formerly the norm in the US military, this practice has been largely condemned in the recent past as being unfair to women and minorities. Assuming that a commander is above such petty

discrimination, I believe that allowing choice of personal staff members enhances a commander's ability, particularly in time of crisis, when he needs the quick reactions of people he trusts to "read his mind." A staff which is used to working together can be a tremendous asset.

Terrain was, and is, an important consideration. I don't think that we have learned, even after Vietnam, that you can not insist that an enemy come out and fight on your terms. The majority of future conflicts are liable to be in primitive countries, against indigenous troops who can and will use terrain (and everything else) to their advantage. We should be wary of becoming so dependent upon our modern weaponry, communications, and computer systems as to render ourselves unable to fight the real wars we are liable to find ourselves in. Perhaps, like Saul, we have to realize that modern chariots won't work in some circumstances (i.e., the Iranian hostage rescue attempt).

Even if the enemy will not fight on our terms, we should avoid blindly accepting war on their terms just because the American public is in a panic. Operational art is the key to success. When Saul neglected it, he led his troops to mass suicide in a set piece battle for which they were unprepared. There are conflicts pending our military involvement today which could have essentially the same effect if we continue our apparent inability to "just say no."

An operational commander must be the consummate chess player -- a forward thinker who anticipates potential contingencies and plans accordingly, not merely one move at a time, but several in advance, always keeping in mind the desired end objective. When David conquered Jerusalem, he was careful not to antagonize the local populace, since he needed to use them for the everyday running of the city, and preferred not to use his soldiers in such a wasteful manner. From the beginning, war termination was uppermost in his thoughts.

The last step must be considered prior to the first -- the desired operational end state should provide the focus for all subsequent planning.

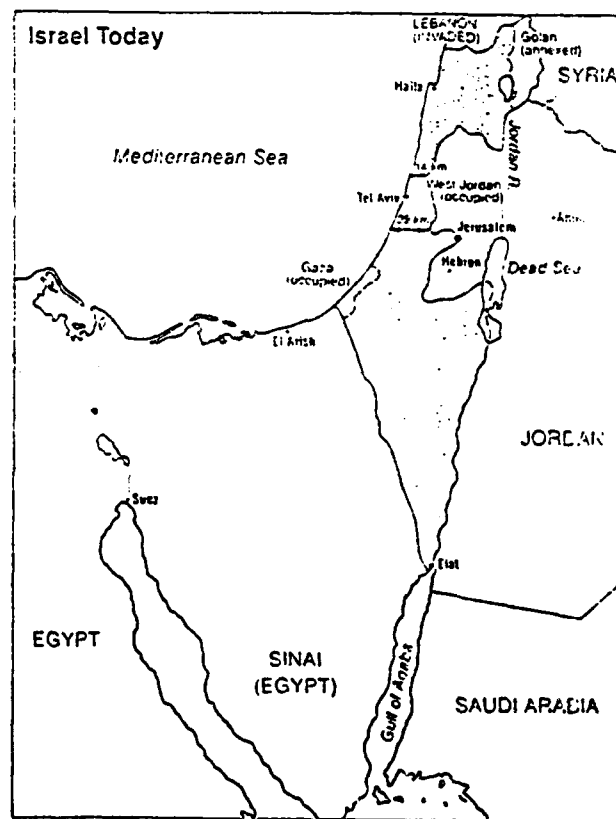
David's knowledge of the Philistine order of battle was invaluable. Spies are expected in time of war; they are much less suspect in time of peace. Intelligence information is critical if operational art is to be achieved. It provides the foundation for sound operational decisions. If the foundation is poor, so too will be (in general), the operational decisions.

The most specific -- and possibly most important -- lesson to be gained from a study of Israel's early evolution is that present-day animosity in this region did not begin with the events of 1948, and it is not going to end with a handshake in the Rose Garden. Religion plays a role there that is beyond the capacity of most Americans to comprehend, and hatreds and tensions are too deeply entrenched. There is never going to be peace in the Near and Middle East. We must plan our future role there accordingly, or prepare to get out of the way.

Figure III

Source: Strategic Atlas, pg. 126

"Retreat had no place in the Israelite lexicon. Israel's only path of retreat led into the sea."¹



NOTES

Chapter I

1. "The Israelites," The New Illustrated Encyclopedia of World History, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 49.

Chapter II

1. "The Land and the People," The New Illustrated Encyclopedia of World History, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 46.
2. "City," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), v. 1, pp. 632-637.
3. Jerry M. Landay, The House of David (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 21-22.

Chapter III

1. Jerry M. Landay, The House of David (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), p. 35.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 42.
4. 1 Samuel 18:7.
5. Emil G. Kraeling, Rand McNally Bible Atlas, 3rd ed. (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1968), p. 188.
6. Landay, p. 88.

Chapter IV

1. Jerry M. Landay, The House of David (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 104-105.
2. Ibid., p. 108.
3. Ibid., pp. 110-111.
4. "Philistines," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), v. 3, p. 794.
5. Landay, pp. 116-117.
6. Ibid., pp. 226-227.

Chapter V

1. Jerry M. Landay, The House of David (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 126-127.
2. Ibid., pp. 127-128.

Chapter VI

1. Jerry M. Landay, The House of David (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), p. 126.

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